



Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge, El Lissitzky, 1919

Mass and Vanguard

We are now at the conclusion of the second part of our Induction course. We have completed our description of the Party, and in a general way, of the mass organisations. The course will now provide materials that will assist in organisational induction for all kinds of purposes; that is, not only in the Party, but also in the non-Party mass movements. It will deal with specific kinds of mass organisation.

Then the course will look at the inter-relationship of such

mass organisations within the local environment, and the key role that the Party has to play in these localities, knitting the mass organisations into an alliance. Finally, it will look at the broad organisational tasks that have been set for this and coming years by the Party, and by the movement as a whole, led by the ANC.

At this point, although without a special text, it can assist us to reflect upon the question of Mass and Vanguard. The Mass/Vanguard relationship is somewhat tacit in the literature. It is not often described as a separate problem.

Lack of understanding of the Mass/Vanguard relationship can lead to serious errors of amateurism, and particularly so among new recruits. There can be an urge to “do things as the Party”. Whereas the Party is not the actor on the historic stage. It is the masses, and not the Party, who constitute the “Subject of History” (i.e. the conscious, willing, agent of change). This is why the ANC as the principle mass organisation of the overall liberation movement must lead, and not at some point in the future, but now, in the present time.

If the Party feels obliged to do work that could be done by a mass democratic structure, then the Party is guilty of having failed to organise and mobilise that necessary structure. The Party should not be getting itself into such a situation, as a rule.

When the Party is substituting itself for the masses, it is in

error. It will burn up its limited resources like that, and it will neglect its true role – the role of vanguard.

As a communist, you are properly inducted when you know that your main work as a communist has to be done **outside** of the confines of the Party, among people who are not communists. This is why the branch life of the Party is important.

SACP branches provide fellowship and solidarity to the leaders of the working class, and they act as “hubs” for the local alliance of local structures that is the local counterpart of the National Democratic Revolutionary Alliance.

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